



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

VOLUME XXIV

NOVEMBER 1918

NUMBER 3

THE ETHICS OF LUXURY AND LEISURE

HERBERT L. STEWART
Dalhousie University

There is an old cynicism which divides mankind into beasts of burden and beasts of prey. It used to be popular with agitators so different as the intellectual English Fabians on the one hand and the quite unintellectual but very zealous Industrial Workers of the World in the United States on the other. And even the man who is as far removed from the spirit of agitation as the Mr. Britling of Mr. Wells's charming novel has been shaken up by the war until he recognizes that the contrast is real, and that the opposition must somehow be healed. Sentiment on the matter has necessarily a longer and more sharply marked history in the Old World than in the New World, and the last hundred years of English thought, both explicit and implicit, have seen striking changes within this field. Let us note a few of them.

I

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century Englishmen were wont to discuss the luxurious and leisured life in a style which makes the reader of the present day, especially in America, stare with astonishment. Such writers as De Quincey and Coleridge, and even Sydney Smith, exhausted themselves in extolling the social value of that part of the community which we should call idle.

The idea is put forward that these persons are socially valuable, not for what they do, but rather for what they are. Those whom Sydney Smith quaintly described as "the lower and middling classes" are bidden to give thanks daily for that pattern of cultured refinement which those above them are fitted both by nature and by circumstance to display, a pattern which it is, of course, impossible for the common man to imitate, but by the mere sight of which the poor day laborer will be redeemed from his native animalism and the sordid merchant will be transfigured. The members of the landed gentry are spoken of as a sort of ideal figures, like the statues upon the Athenian Acropolis, which the working folk may look at, especially in church and at the coming-of-age celebrations of the feudal heir, so that they may be kept relatively civilized.

Nothing is more significant of this point of view than the debates in England a hundred years ago on the subject of the game laws. Each disputant begins by recognizing as the cardinal principle in that matter that every effort must be put forth to keep the squire and his family, with their benign influence, resident upon the land. The awful example of French absenteeism is quoted, and the suggestion is made that but for this want of habitual contact between the orders the horror at Paris in 1793 might never have taken place. How then shall the Great House be kept occupied by its owner? Plainly through making country life attractive to him, and the feature that attracts him most is known to be sport.¹ But what landlord can endure a poacher? At all costs the poacher must be suppressed, or the allurements of foreign dissipation will take the squire abroad, and the exquisite balance of English society, so superior to anything on the anarchic Continent, will be disturbed. If the only effective war against poachers is by setting man traps

¹ It was not only held that the Manor House must be occupied, so that, as Mrs. Cadwallader says in *Middlemarch*, the country may be saved from "farmers without landlords—monsters like buffaloes or bison"—but the occupant must be no mere rich parvenu; he must be one of the ancient stock. Hence even so sturdy a Radical as Cobbett speaks with disgust (*Rural Rides*) of the people being ruled by butchers, bakers, bottle-corkers, and old-clothes men, and of capital as "nothing more than money taken from the labouring classes which being given to army tailors and such like enables them to keep fox-hounds, and trace their descent from the Normans." Cf. the significant provision in the game laws that no one might shoot on preserves unless he had a minimum income *derived from land*.

and spring guns, which will protect the life of a partridge or a hare at the expense of the lives of men, women, and children, it was argued that even so regrettable a measure was worth while. It was of social advantage, for the old family must not be invaded by rural ennui to such an extent that it will leave the Manor House shut up and the peasantry, in consequence, uninspired. Sydney Smith pleaded that a milder measure than placing automatic machines which might shoot the farmer's truant children would serve the purpose. In his merry mood he suggested in preference the stationing of a gamekeeper with a rifle, who should be authorized to shoot trespassers at sight. For, he said, a piece of mechanism cannot distinguish one from another, and might even take the life of a friend of the administration! In his more serious temper he said plainly that a squire who wanted, or would use, such means of bloodthirsty suppression was the sort of man who had much better be an absentee.

But Sydney Smith himself had no doubt of the ennobling influence upon the public which might be expected from a resident landlord, however his best nature might revolt against the existing dominance of squire and parsons which he humorously entitled "squarson" rule.¹ Dickens came closer to realities in his picture of the "fine old country gentleman" in *Barnaby Rudge*, about whom everyone said that the disappearance of such a type was sending England to rack and ruin. He could write his name almost legibly, was very severe with poachers, could drink more strong wine, go to bed every night more drunk and get up more sober than any man in the county. "In knowledge of horseflesh he was almost equal to a farrier, in stable learning he surpassed his own head groom, and in gluttony not a pig on his estate was a match for him. He had no seat in Parliament himself, but he was extremely patriotic, and usually drove his voters up to the poll with his own hands. He was warmly attached to the Church, and never appointed to the living in his gift any but a three-bottle man and

¹ Cf. his article on the game laws in the *Edinburgh Review* (1819). He writes: "A great man returning from London to spend his summer in the country diffuses intelligence, improves manners, restrains the extreme violence of subordinate politicians, and makes the middling and lower classes better acquainted with, and more attached to, their natural leaders."

a first-rate fox hunter."¹ In the first quarter of the century, however, the time for such satire had not come. Shelley, indeed, used to break forth about

Those gilded flies
That, basking in the sunshine of a court,
Fatten on its corruption. . . .
The drones of the community.²

Godwin used to declare that until the institution of property was abolished the moral nature of man could never get a chance.³ But Shelley and Godwin were looked upon as outcasts. A Lake poet was the true champion of social orthodoxy. If one of the leisured class turned out to be even more than an unconscious model of high culture, to exhibit in addition some of the common human sympathies, such littérateurs would hail the thing as a portent. For it was not only the virtue proper to that special rank. It was supererogative virtue. Coleridge, for example, went into ecstasies over the Duchess of Devonshire. Her Grace was a poetess in spare time, and on a tour over Mount Gothard had written some lines in admiration of William Tell. Here was a moral indeed, which must by no means be left unpointed for the lower and middling classes. To think of an exalted lady who could write so! The genius of the duchess had broken all bonds of environment. By birth, by education, by caste prejudice, she might surely have been expected to sympathize with the elegant diversions of Gessler and to look upon Tell's resentment at having to shoot an apple off his child's head as the sullen contumacy of a peasant. But no—

Light as a dream your days their circlets ran
From all that teaches brotherhood to Man
Far, far removed!

.
And yet, free Nature's uncorrupted child,
You hailed the chapel and the platform wild
Where once the Austrian fell
Beneath the shaft of Tell!
O Lady, nursed in pomp and pleasure!
Whence learned you that heroic measure?⁴

¹ *Barnaby Rudge*, chap. xlvii.

³ *Political Justice*.

² *Queen Mab*.

⁴ "Ode to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire."

Those good old days passed away, and a new tone came into English literature. A demand began to be made upon the aristocracy that their conduct should be judged by the usual moral standards. The *ancien régime* was openly ridiculed. And the blundering attempt of the privileged order to placate the new democratic spirit by feigning an aristocratic interest in the commonalty was ridiculed most viciously of all. Lady Bowley in *The Chimes* is depicted as having introduced the evening amusement of pinking and eyelet-holing for the villagers, and as having set to music these edifying lines which the men and boys might sing as they carried it on:

O let us love our occupations,
 Bless the squire and his relations,
 Live upon our daily rations,
 And always keep our proper stations.¹

Anthony Trollope in *Framley Parsonage* makes Mr. Harold Smith, when on the stump for votes, begin a speech by explaining that the special British characteristic of that period was the willingness of the highly placed to put their time and knowledge without fee or reward at the disposal of the poor, and proceeds to illustrate this by a sort of university-extension lecture to the farm laborers upon the state of the South Sea Islands. But there was a real change, the sort of change that Thackeray speaks of when he sets in contrast the Lady Lorraine of the days of the Prince Regent and the Lady Lorraine of the middle nineteenth century. The former had been magnificent in diamonds and velvet, daring in rouge, with the wits of the world at her feet. The latter was dressed like a governess, talked astronomy and laboring classes and emigration, and went to church at eight o'clock in the morning. The Great House, once a center of conviviality, had come to permit only two glasses of wine after dinner, and half the guests were country curates "whose talk is about Polly Higson's progress at school or widow Watkins's lumbago."² And Charles Kingsley, whose crusade might naturally have led him to the opposite sort of exaggeration, makes Alton Locke declare that visiting the sick and

¹ *The Chimes*.

² *Pendennis*, chap. lxvii.

teaching in the schools have become matters of course in the families of most squires and noblemen who reside on their estates.¹

Probably no writer of the time did so much to further this reform as did Thomas Carlyle. In 1843 appeared *Past and Present* with its mordant chapter "Unworking Aristocracy." No less a critic than Mr. R. H. Hutton has bidden us mark there the beginning of an epoch, a period during which it would be no longer possible in anything like the old degree to apologize for—still less to vindicate—the claim of anyone to be idle. "A man with £200,000 a year," wrote Carlyle in his journal, "eats the whole fruit of 6,666 men's labour through a year; for you can get a stout spademan to work and maintain himself for the sum of £30. Thus we have private individuals whose wages are equal to the wages of seven or eight thousand other individuals. What do these highly beneficed individuals *do* to society for their wages? *Kill partridges*. Can this last? No, by the soul that is in man it cannot, and will not, and shall not." What he wrote in his private journal Carlyle preached in season and out of season through his published books. The same tale was taken up by Ruskin in his gospel of work. Mill prefaced his chapter on the laboring classes² by a declaration that no state of society is just in which there is any class which is not laboring, except those who are unable to labor, or who have fairly earned rest by previous toil. The men who proclaimed this message of a universal obligation to be economical and industrious did not address their words, like a fashionable sermon, to those who least needed the reproof. They spoke to those who needed it most.

Just at present, in the stress of war necessities, everyone is talking in a similar strain. The form which the question now takes is not so much whether anyone is entitled to an income from the

¹ *Alton Locke*, chap. xxv. But compare the anecdote related by J. A. Froude in his lecture "On the Uses of a Landed Gentry" (1876), an anecdote of all the more significance, because it told against the point its narrator was trying to make. In the year before the Irish famine Froude was staying at a large house in Connaught where more than a hundred gentlemen of the county sat down to lunch on the lawn. Froude's neighbor at table said to him: "In all the number there may be one, at the most two, who believe that the Almighty put them into this world for any purpose but to shoot grouse, race, gamble, drink, or break their necks in the hunting-field."

² *Political Economy*, Book IV, chap. vii.

public which neither he nor his ancestors have genuinely earned. It is rather to what extent he may dispose at his arbitrary choice, for purely personal or family purposes, of that surplus of money which has, by whatever means, come into his possession. It is the problem we get in the newspapers under the title "Shall Wealth as Well as Men Be Conscribed?" But this is not merely a war problem; it is a peace problem as well. The underlying principles for solving it must be the same, and at bottom it is one with the old issue of labor and sloth. In each case we have individual "right" versus social good. As no little confusion of thought has revealed itself among the disputants, it is perhaps worth while to subject the matter to a careful scrutiny. We must carry it back to first principles.

II

Aristotle once declared that the way in which a man means to spend his money should be reckoned among the grave *moral* decisions of life. By this he intended no such truism as that money, like everything else, is an instrument of conduct capable of being used for purposes good, bad, or indifferent. If this had been all that was in his mind he might as well have recognized a separate virtue in the fitting use of the eye or the hand. It is plain that he saw in wealth some special characteristic or opportunity which made it worth ethical treatment by itself. The distinctions which he proceeded to draw were to prove significant beyond what he could have guessed, and in circumstances which he could not have foreseen.

But to many persons his foundation principle, so far from being a trite commonplace—as by this time it surely ought to be—will seem rather a strained and unnatural paradox. They will hesitate, on patriotic grounds, to say so just now, but their efforts to evade its consequences will often spring from a real doubt of its truth. In ages of prosperous commercialism the use of money is likely to be regarded as a matter of individual whim. It appears so to the very rich more than to the poor, and it was rich men, relatively speaking, that Aristotle had before him. To those whose struggle is for a subsistence the employment of each dollar is a problem sufficiently solemn to dispense with any emphasizing by

a moralist. The disposal of superfluities is something which they know only by hearsay, and they tend to look with sardonic mirth upon the casuistry of millionaire finance. The millionaire in turn is often impatient if other people have "views" as to what he should do with his own. For what, he asks, is the use of acquiring a fortune if I may not please myself in the object to which I apply it? Granted that it has been justly obtained—that it is the product of my exertions and skill, or has been bequeathed to me by someone who in turn secured it by legitimate means—who dares question my right to spend it at my free choice, so long as I do no injury with it to my neighbor? Whose business is it to interfere with my luxuries or to criticize me for being idle? If I have made money in trade, may I not consult my taste as to whether I build a hospital or start a racing-stud? And though the moralist may perhaps admire me if I do the former, and ignore, while he envies, me if I do the latter, surely I am at least entitled to be free from his impertinent comments.

Now this doctrine of the rich man's immunity from any criticism of his style of living is precisely what Aristotle seems to deny. He advances instead the startling theory that no man can speak of "doing what he will with his own," just because there is nothing that is our "own" apart from moral responsibility for the way we employ it. For example, if there is anything over which we might claim such unfettered control, it is surely our bodies. Yet no one has ever justified the poor man who debases himself with liquor, provided only he does not make himself a nuisance on the street and keeps so far above the point of destitution that he will not become chargeable for support upon the rates. He has, no doubt, a legal right in most countries to be as drunk as he chooses at his own cost and within his own home. But the spendthrift millionaire who plumes himself upon his freedom from such sins of the flesh will be the first to pronounce judgment upon the alcoholic artisan and will not hesitate to do so even if no starving family can be pointed out as a reproach to the sensual parent. Quite apart from the wrong done to anyone else, our millionaire will dwell, according to his secular or his religious way of expressing himself, upon the offense against "self-respect" or upon "defacing the image of God." And

if this principle be sound, as it surely is, we must press it to its last inference. It may turn out that the life of idiotic ostentation makes humanity quite as despicable as the life of a drunkard, and that the image of God is less defaced in a saloon of the Bowery than in those jeweled birthday parties for dogs with which the New York Four Hundred disgust all civilized mankind.

We may, if we choose, draw a sharp distinction between a man's "private life" and his "public obligations." We may say that some of his acts, because they are such as affect others, must be scrutinized and judged, but that there is a little circle of conduct which concerns only himself, and upon which criticism from his neighbor is presumptuous. But this, as has been shown over and over again, is a distinction of a legal and not of a moral kind. It is of use to tell us which acts, morally bad, the state should endeavor to restrain, and which, despite their badness, the state had best ignore. Even for this purpose the criterion of self-regarding and other-regarding has been found less and less satisfactory, as in recent times the positive function of law in stimulating goodness of life has asserted itself against the old negative idea of merely keeping order. And though the distinction were fully admitted, the use of money is very plainly among the acts by which the individual influences his surroundings. Once we realize that this is a moral and not a legal question the last plausibility for ruling it out of order disappears.

But while we have here just as reasonable a province for moral criticism as anything in conduct can be, there is an obvious ground why such criticism must be specially cautious. For we are dealing with acts which cannot be sharply contrasted as "right" and "wrong." We have to do with those which, as Aristotle would say, get their moral quality from time and place and extent and accompanying circumstances. The amount a man should spend each year, and the objects to which his expenditure should be devoted, depend for the most part on facts which are very imperfectly known to any outsider, and some of which can be known only by himself. The reproachful names of miser and spendthrift are thrown about with appalling rashness. One's means, one's liabilities, the number and needs of those for whom one is responsible,

one's own capacity for using and enjoying as distinct from mere desire for plutocratic display—these and many other items enter into the calculus. What is extravagant in this person may well be parsimonious in that, not only because the one is rich and the other poor, or because the one has dependents and the other has none, but because a higher scale of living may be of genuine social advantage in some cases and of social disadvantage in others, or because that which is in one person an added refinement of life may be in another a piece of vulgar ostentation. The man whose children have shown aptitudes which call for unusual expenditure on their training should limit his personal luxuries in a way which would not be imperative if such latent powers had not discovered themselves, and in a way which would merit only contempt if he were aiming to be able to boast, like Mr. Bounderby about his wife, that a son or a daughter had “lots of expensive knowledge.” The artist who is able to appreciate great pictures, and the antiquarian whose soul is genuinely in the past, may surely indulge such tastes more than the retired brewer who buys merely to exhibit how little his purse is affected by the longest price. The President of the United States often maintains a simpler household than the president of a trust, but most of us probably believe that this is an inversion of what is socially expedient, and that good reasons are producible for what would elsewhere be extravagant ostentation when the dignity of the national head is to be sustained. But while common sense recognizes that a confident judgment upon our neighbor is, in this province, seldom possible, it should also recognize that each man should for that very reason scrutinize himself with all the greater strictness. What he is doing is, quite definitely, right or wrong. Just in proportion as he can get little help from the public conscience or the current conventions he must erect a standard for his own guidance with the more scrupulous care.

Let me now indicate the kind of considerations which appeal to my own mind as relevant to this issue.

III

To begin with, the legitimacy of the leisured and luxurious life can never be admitted in any sense which would conceal the eternal

principle that some form of useful, strenuous, even exhausting work is both the duty and the privilege of every man and woman in good physical and mental health.

This is a principle which ought to seem obvious, and if it is worth while to reassert it, this is not because, like so many other acknowledged truths, it is widely ignored in practice. It is because in so many quarters, at least in time of peace, it is unblushingly denied in theory. So far from work being accepted as the privilege of all men and all women, it is not seldom spoken of as a grievous burden which most of them have to bear, which a few have the luck to avoid altogether, and from which all must be expected to make good their escape as quickly as possible. Men speak of those careers as specially advantageous in which enough can be saved to permit retirement from active duty at an early age. The heir to a large property is described as a favorite of Fortune, because he is dispensed from the compulsion to work for a livelihood. "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" is looked upon as the primitive *curse* upon mankind, and in defiance of what we read about Adam being placed in the garden "to till it and to dress it," the idea seems to be either that his place in Paradise was one of unbroken leisure, or that labor was not at that blessed era followed by its now familiar physical exhaustion.

But the extent to which the principle of work is, in one's secret heart, denied becomes most obvious of all when we confront it with the sentiments of women in what are called the higher social ranks. I need hardly say that I do not here speak of these ranks as a class. No one can judge to what proportion these remarks will apply, but I am sure that it is quite large enough to be appreciable and even important. That anyone should be unchivalrous enough to say that "society women" should be compelled to work will be learned by not a few with astonishment. Perhaps among the female sex there are not many except those in the ranks of feminism and suffragism who are really willing to indorse the law of equal exertion in all its fulness. There are circles in which incapacity for all strenuous effort, whether of body or of mind, is accepted, equally with anemic pallor of face, as a token of gentle birth and refined upbringing. There are wider circles in which women who as a

matter of fact obey the wholesome instinct to make themselves useful in their own homes are careful to conceal such a vulgar trait from their friends, so ashamed are they to be thought of as having fallen below the genteel level where idleness and dissipation are the whole function of womanhood. They speak indeed of their "social duties," but to those who know their habits this is a term *pour rire*, and it is impossible to suppose that they seem even to themselves to be fulfilling any purpose of social utility. The idea of either becoming mothers or facing the self-denial which the charge of a nursery would involve is being treated more and more in a fashion which makes eugenists despair. The assumption is that the wife of a carpenter, a chauffeur, or a small storekeeper must recognize these and many other obligations, but that wives who are above such *canaille* are persons to be worked for and catered to. Hence the baffling problem in so many wealthy homes of finding some means by which the tedious hours may be made to pass, some method of filling in without insufferable ennui the time that must elapse between a late breakfast and an early lunch or between the afternoon and the evening bridge. Hence the unspeakable idea that delicate refinement will be shown by procuring from the chemist some drug or paste which produces a hue suggestive of disease, and the equally degrading notion that it lowers a woman to admit herself capable, far less eager, of assisting her servants in case of need. The fault, of course, is not wholly theirs. The old-time chivalry of men has degenerated into the new-time sentimentality, and the idea has been sedulously fostered that marriage is or should be an end to the working days of every woman who "marries well"; in other words, that every woman whose husband is not insolvent should regard herself as ornamental, a heroine of romance for whom mere men should be proud to be martyred. This is the creed of the modern, no less than of the mediaeval, squire of dames. "How," asks the Countess of Croye in *Quentin Durward*, "How should a high-born lady be known from a sunburnt milkmaid, save that spears are broken for the one and only hazel-poles shattered for the other?" *Mutatis mutandis* the question is still unanswerable to a large number in our century.

The suffrage agitation has been a splendid rebuff to those who drivel in this way about womanhood. Socrates once compared an argument which leaves one's opponent speechless to the shock given by the torpedo fish. That formidable creature benumbed by its very touch all that came in contact with it. The maudlin worshiper of ornamental women has been allowed to know just what intelligent women think of him and his worship, so that those who would talk like a knight of chivalry in one of Scott's novels have at length had the nonsense frozen upon their lips. Whether the leaders of feminism are right or wrong about the vote, they deserve immense gratitude for having risen in disgust against a view of their sex which would exclude it from all the dignities, all the interests, all the enthusiasms which ennoble humanity through work. It is a sure instinct which has told them that that honor rooted in dishonor stands, and that not in complaint but in pride should one say, "We only toil who are the first of things." Perhaps in the coming age even novelists will find some more urgent question about women than whether the beauty that is *petite* is better than the beauty that is willowy. If so, we shall have escaped in some measure from the oriental, perhaps even the sensual, standpoint. And it will be the robust resentment of Mrs. Pankhurst and her like that will have effected the reform.

But is the principle of universal labor fatal to luxury in every sense? Carlyle seems to have longed, as for a kind of millennium, for the day when all human beings would be compelled to be industrious under the penalty of being starved. "If any man will not work according to his ability, let him perish according to his necessity; there is no juster law than that." There is an obvious hindrance to our making this effective. However we may deplore an idle life, we cannot prevent it without interfering in a very dangerous way with the right of accumulating wealth and with the freedom of bequest. So long as a person is permitted to store his savings, no one can forbid him to retire and rest upon his past as soon as he thinks he has secured enough, even though it would be immensely better both for himself and for others that he should continue in active exertion. As long as a rich father is allowed to endow his lazy son, what stimulus to effort will be of any avail?

Clearly any measure which would restrict thrift must be socially disastrous, both in removing a motive for energy and in providing a temptation to wasteful extravagance. It is perhaps not so clear that to limit bequest would have bad effects, although it would be very difficult to prevent evasions of such a law by timely gifts made during the life of the testator. Such points are, however, of legal rather than of moral significance. But in addition one must recognize that some degree both of luxury and of leisure serves an important social purpose.

IV

Only from the standpoint of asceticism, or extreme Puritanism, can one deny the value of maintaining a standard of life above the level of bare physical necessities. Nor can it be doubted that the desire to secure this is a powerful impulse to exertion, and that in its absence very many of those who are now strenuous in their daily callings would recede to that minimum beyond which they would see no object to be secured. The artisan who seeks for some modest adornment for his home may be said to be aiming at luxury, and as I write these lines the evening newspaper brings me the news that according to a professor in Harvard every person who spends more than twelve cents a day on food is just now to be called luxurious. But it is the prospect of something beyond this which commonly makes the artisan a better workman, and if he wishes to obtain it not merely for himself but for his wife and children, he is moved by a feeling which deserves all the encouragement we can give it. One recalls *Enoch Arden*:

Thus earn'd a scanty living for himself;
Yet since he did but labour for himself,
Work without hope, there was not life in it
Whereby the man could live.

Objects of aesthetic enjoyment, whether they be, on one level, a cottage piano, or, on another, a rare and wonderful painting, may be looked upon as luxuries. But they are so only in that sense in which Providence has made the earth luxurious. They cannot be condemned without reflecting on those lilies of the field which have

no utilitarian function, and which as a means to the development of man's highest faculties are, even in a strict sense, useful. No doubt a very urgent question arises as to how far one part of mankind is entitled to indulge in such adornments of life while other parts are still unprovided with necessities. It has been pertinently asked by one of our leading moralists¹ whether the existence of Egyptian slavery can be defended on the ground that without it the pyramids would probably have no place in the itinerary of the modern globe-trotter. Those who pinch themselves in order to give more today to the Red Cross fund are choosing between values, and their choice is beyond all criticism. But the alternative is present in quite as real, though in a less spectacular, form in all the piping times of peace. Some day, let us hope, greater success will be reached in establishing an equitable distribution, not only of what is needed to sustain life, but of what is effective for embellishing it. But it seems equally apparent that as the world is at present constituted certain advantages, if they are to be at the disposal of anyone at all, must be restricted to a minority, and that the effort to equalize would result in the serious curtailing, if not the destruction, of that which we are aiming to share.

Moreover, it is plain that not in every calling can the community exact an audit from the worker which will prove that he gives back in production an equivalent for what he receives in wages. It is desirable perhaps to pay a poet laureate. But few would suggest that he must turn out a fixed quota of poetry per year. There is no class of higher social importance than the scientists who are engaged in original research, but to expect them to exhibit discoveries with the regularity with which Mr. Henry Ford turns out cars would not facilitate the purpose we have in view. Querulous persons often ask why a university professor should work only six months in the year, forgetful of the fact, not only that his salary is so inconsiderable, but that if you work him much beyond this limit his activities in self-culture will stop, that as he ceases to learn himself his power as a teacher will decline, and that all hope of his advancing his subject by original research will have to be abandoned. It is nature's law that the labor which is mechanical

¹ Dr. Hastings Rashdall in *The Theory of Good and Evil*.

can be sustained for longer periods at a stretch than the labor which is inventive. Hence for certain professions it is recognized that some degree of leisure, of unscrutinized freedom, of pecuniary security beyond what is in strictness "earned," must be conceded. No doubt these allowances may suffer abuse. Your poet, your investigator, your academic teacher, may be simply slothful when he pretends to be fulfilling the functions of originality. But in that case the mistake was in appointing the wrong man. A certain proportion of such appointments will fall to wrong men, but this is a chance which must be taken if you would get for such vocations at the current rates of salary any men at all who will *not* be wrong ones.

Again, while the argument of Sydney Smith and Coleridge about a refining influence in the cultured rich was pushed to a ridiculous extreme, our present danger appears to be the converse one of failing to see any force in such considerations at all. Inequalities of rank arise of necessity in even the most democratic system. Higher and lower modes of life exist side by side. The day laborer and the millionaire cannot be equalized, except in formulas which, as we know, are in the main conspicuous only when the millionaire wants the day laborer's vote. If anyone supposes that feudal arrogance is confined to an old country, the Industrial Workers of the World will be prepared to enlighten him. And amid the obvious social evils of such caste difference only prejudice and class hatred will deny that it has also social advantages. The reaction, even at a distance, of a more cultivated type upon a less cultivated has effects which are better than the dull average, where each has managed to obliterate by contact what was distinctively good in the other. If the "democratic" workman is more independent, he is also less polite; if he does not cringe to a superior man, he is also disposed to deny reverence to anything as superior; if he asserts the brotherhood of the race, he is likely to construe this as depriving of all value that in which any part of the race excels himself. Are any of us quite without misgivings, for example, of the extent to which learning, art, and poetry, the things in which nature has made men unequal and which no law can equalize, would be fostered under a régime in which democracy would meet with no counter-

vailing checks? The guardianship of these things is a contribution which, in fairness, we must recognize as that of the less democratic countries to the common treasury of mankind.

One principle, however, is obvious. The luxuries in which we may indulge ourselves and the sort of leisure we pronounce legitimate are never to be determined simply by the length of our purse. They must be such as genuinely minister in some way to the higher activities of the spirit, and this rule will at a stroke abolish an immense quantity of the prevalent expenditure. That much of this is, in the face of the world's needs, an enormity for which all defense is mere shamelessness no conscientious person will deny. The multiplication of mere sensuous comforts, especially when dictated, as it so commonly is, by rivalry in display with our neighbor, means a vulgarizing of life for which no apology is possible. Through observance of this elementary principle what a saving would be effected in jewelry bills, in bills for restless, unintelligent foreign travel, in bills for new houses and fresh decorations dictated by the mere whim of fashion, in bills for exclusive designs, and creations, and *chic* millinery! Take the advertisement of a present-day "millionaire's hotel," with the assurance it gives of "the very last word in sumptuousness." Is not this one of the features of our time upon which we all trust that a wiser age will look back, not only with condemnation, but with a sense of nausea? For of all the freaks which make modern society despicable there is none more fit to be despised than this competitive ostentation. To say that it is unworthy of a Christian epoch is to say little. That which our world cannot abjure at the call of the Golden Rule Greek and Roman culture refused to admit from a mere sense of decorum. Aristotle poured scorn on *βαναυσία καὶ ἀπειροκαλία καὶ ὅσαι τοιαῦται*.¹ They were un-Hellenic, oriental, semibarbarous. What a world of meaning there is in that tale of Plutarch about Alexander being surprised at Susa by Greek ambassadors when he thought himself far enough from home to indulge for a little in Persian luxuriousness! At the sight of a Greek wallowing in Eastern vulgarity the ambassadors laughed loud and long, and Alexander so understood that laugh that he could not forgive it. It was only in the decay of

¹ *Nic. Eth.* iv. 2.

the early imperial centuries at Rome that the satirist could draw a picture of wealthy freedmen boasting of the expensiveness of the wines with which they entertained their guests in a strain that reminds us of a "ten-thousand-dollar dinner" in the press reports of today.

Moralizings of this general and somewhat abstract kind seldom come home to the masses of the people. They are ignored by some as pulpit commonplaces, resented by others who "hate to be preached at," put out of sight most thoroughly of all by a feigned cordiality toward the principle, joined with a resolve to ward off all particular applications. Some great idea, some concrete purpose, must grip and thrill the collective imagination if men are to be really driven back to think upon the fundamental things. The excesses of individual luxury have today a new heinousness in every nation whose public spirit has been tried and tempered in the war. If one had in view the national morale of England or France, simply as this has been revealed during the last three years, much in the foregoing pages would have to be condemned as exaggeration and unfairness. Everyone knows the immense self-sacrifice of the men, the transfigured character of the women, the almost universal spirit of seeking not one's own. None can doubt that the United States will show a like solidarity. Thank God for those forces long latent which have burst above the surface and made us realize that the public is better at heart than it allowed anyone to know. But it is just these forces which we should try to prevent from sinking into latency again. A war peril is not the only summons to effort. Is what we have seen and welcomed to prove itself after all a mere passing wave? Or is it to mean a great and permanent rise in social character? The cynic professes to know as a historical induction that such enthusiasms must quickly spend themselves. At times he is prepared to say that the recoil is proportioned in every case to the advance, for are not action and reaction equal and opposite? By such gnostic saws and by the plausible foolishness of such metaphors from physics the hope of social reformers is too easily damped. If enthusiasm dies away this is commonly because no means are taken to keep its flame alive. What history really teaches is that progress of the permanent sort is from age

to age effected and secured. An upward movement lasting in its results is no more impossible in morals than in industry. Why should not the change we have seen in this special department of civic behavior be seized and fixed? Why may not its foundation principle be sought out, proclaimed, enforced to consequences far beyond the sphere in which it was first laid down? The thrill and the challenge of a new time are upon us. I for one do not think it chimerical to hope, and I am sure that it is cowardly to take for granted that we may not hope, for a day when what is now the rare virtue of our best shall be the commonplace achievement of our average, when the civic self-denial which we are proud to have shown in any degree everyone will be ashamed to have failed to show in a far higher degree. What can we do to hasten its coming?